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US has history of trying to keep secrets out of news

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WASHINGTON – CIA director William Casey's successful effort to pressure the Washington Post into not printing details of a US intelligence operation was not the first time officials have moved to keep state secrets out of the news.

In 1979, the government filed a restraining order against The Progressive magazine to prevent publication of an article describing the design of a hydrogen bomb. Government lawyers finally dropped the case after a small newspaper in Wisconsin, The Madison Press-Connection, published an article that they said contained similar information.

Yesterday, Erwin Knoll, editor of the Progressive, said, "The [Madison] article wasn't at all similar to ours. It was the government's way to get off the hook before they got an adverse ruling from the appellate court. My only regret about that whole incident is that I obeyed the court order [not to publish]."

The piece finally ran in the October 1979 issue. The injunction, the first imposed on a US magazine for national-security reasons, lasted six months, 19 days.

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter called to the Oval Office Washington Post executive editor Benjamin C. Bradlee and reporter Bob Woodward – the same people Casey more recently pressured – to request they not publish an article revealing that the United States had been paying nearly $1 million a year to King Hussein of Jordan. On that occasion, the Post published anyway.

Project Jennifer

In 1975, reporters with the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post and several other papers learned of Project Jennifer, a CIA operation that used the Glomar Explorer, an excavation ship built by Howard Hughes, to try to dig up the remains of a sunken Soviet submarine with nuclear missiles onboard.

Then-CIA director William Colby persuaded all the publishers not to print any stories about the operation since it was still ongoing and a matter of national security. But syndicated columnist Jack Anderson then learned of the operation, could not be dissuaded by Colby, and broadcast a report on it over his radio show. The other newspapers then felt free to publish.

Colby had kept the New York Times story on hold for nearly a year. According to "Without Fear Or Favor," Harrison Salisbury's inside history of the Times, executive editor Abe Rosenthal wrote in a memo to publisher Arthur Sulzberger one year after publication, "I think frankly Colby used us on the Soviet submarine story."

The same year, New York Times reporter Seymour Hersh, who also was involved in the Glomar story, wrote a very detailed article about a highly secretive intelligence program called Operation Holystone, in which US reconnaissance submarines probed up and down Soviet coastlines, sometimes even navigating through internal waterways, bumping up against Soviet trawlers.

The government did not try to prosecute the Times, although Hersh says he later learned that the Justice Department did conduct a major investigation and considered indicting him. The story the Post did not print is reportedly similar to Hersh's.

In 1972, Ramparts magazine published an interview with a former National Security Agency analyst, who revealed how the agency operated in Vietnam, in Europe, and – most sensitively – how it tracked the movements of Soviet submarines. The government did nothing, on the grounds that bringing the ex-official to court would constitute an admission that his stories were true.

U-2 flights

In 1958, New York Times reporter Hanson Baldwin learned of the military's supersecret U-2 spy plane, which was taking pictures over the Soviet Union. CIA deputy director Robert Amory convinced him not to publish because the program was necessary for learning about Soviet missile development. Reporters for the Washington Post and Cleveland Plain Dealer also agreed not to publish.

In 1960, a U-2 was shot down inside the USSR, causing a major diplomatic crisis. The newspapers then published their detailed stories. All along, the Soviets knew the U-2 existed.

Over the years the case that has been referred to most in the debate over whether to publish an article that could jeopardize national security is President Kennedy's decision to allow a CIA-sponsored invasion of Cuba in 1961. After an internal debate among editors, The Times decided to publish a story that reported only that anti-Casto units were training in Florida, and left out the imminence of the invasion.

Perhaps the most serious case of printing secrets occurred in 1942, when the Chicago Tribune reported that the US Navy won the Battle of Midway because it had broken Japanese military codes. The Navy tried to prosecute the Tribune under the 1917 Espionage Act. A grand jury did not indict the newspaper.

Even so – according to "And I Was There," the memoirs of Edwin Layton, the Pacific Fleet's intelligence officer during the war – the Japanese learned their codes had been broken not from the Tribune article but from the publicity generated by the government's lawsuit. Only then did they change their codes.